GOT THE HOLLOW POINTS FOR THE

SNITCHES

The Persistence of Snitch Culture in Communities of Resistance & How to Defeat It

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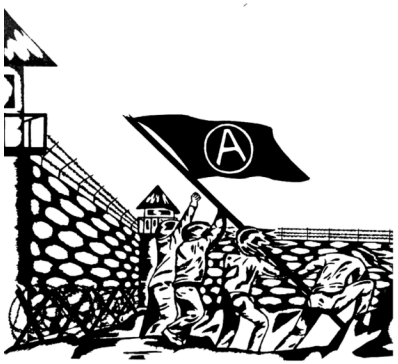
with whatever weapons at hand



"Homeboy was talking to the po-po, we had to let everybody know that was a no-no, he thought he was on the low low, and was surprised when I hit him with the fo-fo"

— Uncle Murda, "Bullet, Bullet"

With the growing wave of repression by the state towards direct action oriented struggles, radicals have been bombarded with the shameful concern of snitches and informants. In a struggle which is purely of choice and individual realization, as opposed to a rich cultural or family heritage, a value of dedication to one's community has been shamefully been neglected by some.

The following article provides a brief look into how radical communities of the past have approached traitors to the community, while at the same time proposing how more unique struggles can learn from it.

As Anarchists, we fight in the face of what appears to be insurmountable odds; our project of liberation is the natural enemy of the culture of authority and capitalism we now live under. Considering that our revolt against the institutions of domination are not isolated pockets of resistance, and that we do not live separately from the rest of society, our communities are inevitably affected—and perhaps infected—by the culture we are aiming to destroy.

Snitch Culture is not exclusive to Communities in Resistance, but is one thread of control in the larger social fabric of America. Those in power want people to snitch on each other—especially those from communities that are targeted by the government and are therefore more vulnerable to Snitch Culture—because snitching works to create a climate of fear and mistrust that can fragment the populations that threaten the structures of power.

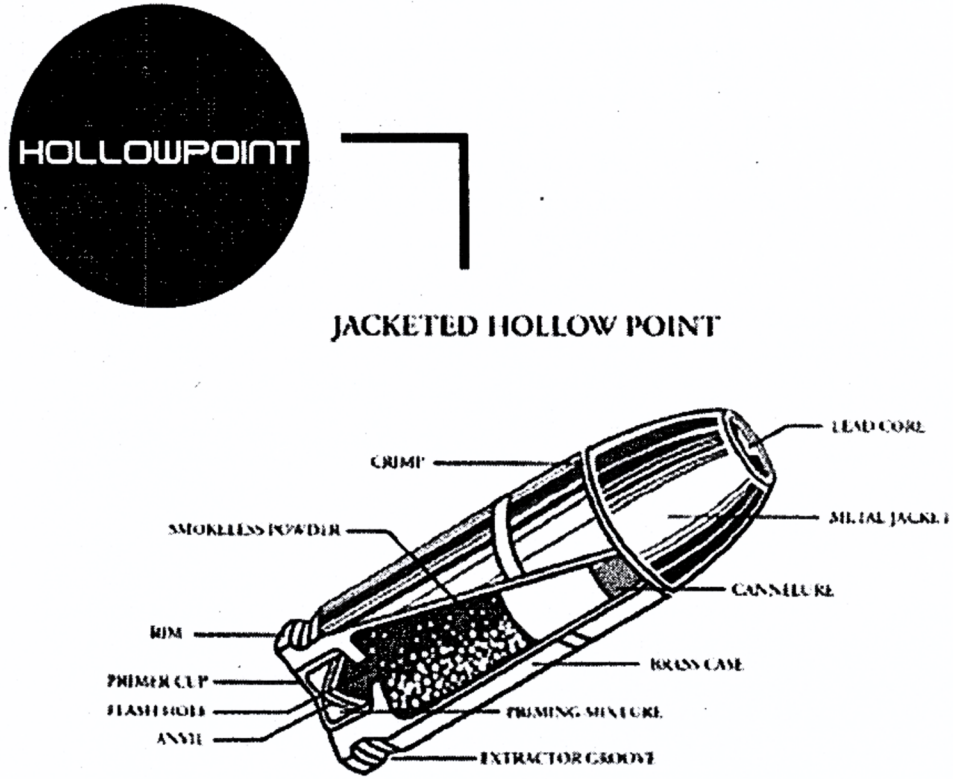
For example, in the war against the poor and people of color—those that fill the prisons of America—the State promotes snitching as a means to perpetuate crime by creating a 'revolving door' in which low-level drug dealers, addicts, and other petty offenders are arrested and released with orders to provide more information in order to create more arrests in order to fill more prisons. The effects of this cycle of snitch-and-prison are that entire communities are torn apart, families broken up, and the United States has the largest prison population in the world.

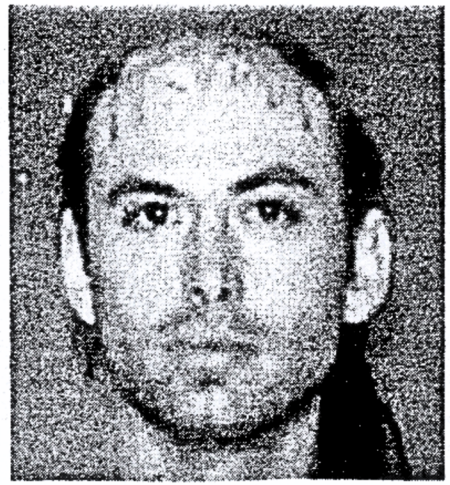
In Anarchist circles everyone knows that Snitch Culture breaks solidarity among activists and paralyzes our ability to wage effective resistance. Though there is much complaining and hand-writing about the divisive roles snitches play in our communities, we have engaged in very little constructive action about this serious and persistent problem. This zine is an attempt to educate and foster dialogue in our communities in order to develop effective strategies for dealing with snitches and to forge a resistance that can withstand the attacks of power.

To start, we must realize that Snitch Culture is not a new phenomena or only particular to Anarchists, and that many Communities of Resistance in North America and Europe have come up with a number of different ways—some more effective than others—to deal with Snitch Culture while maintaining their core values.

There are three components—perhaps of unequal importance—that resistance groups and others have traditionally used to determine their response to snitches: practicality, the agreeability to the core values of the group, and tactical benefit.

The ultra-militant Red Army Faction (RAF) in West Germany tried to use something





condone snitching. Snitching represents the most vile betrayal of one's self and one's community and although we may not be able to prevent Snitch Culture now, this does not mean that we should not continue in the active removal of snitches from our communities at present and withdraw support from all collaborators immediately. But now we know that this is not enough. To eradicate Snitch Culture we must set ourselves upon the task of building a long-term resistance that can withstand the attacks of power, and that will take time and a lot of hard work. We must create strategies that look beyond today and will allow us to proactively deal with State repression, not only to defeat Snitch Culture, but to create a world of our desires.

called "Revolutionary Discipline" to respond to a growing number of snitches. This discipline drew heavily on the promise of immediate personal reprisals for snitching. Snitches both in jail and out were subject to vicious beatings and in one case, a snitch was blinded. This type of response was practical for the RAF because they had a number of supporters both inside and outside of jail. Most snitches could be easily located and jumped by supporters or actual RAF members. It was agreeable to the RAF because it fit in with their concepts of both Revolutionary Discipline and a glorification of violence. However, it did not prove to be an effective tactic for reducing the impact of snitches. By the end of the RAF's existence, snitches were an important part of the State's efforts to not only disrupt, but to arrest numerous members of the RAF—including its leadership. The tactics they employed did not seem to reduce Snitch Culture within their own ranks or of other contemporary militant radical organizations in West Germany.

The Weather Underground (WU) also had an extreme but somewhat different strategy when confronting the problem of snitches. The WU used terror as a way to stop the effectiveness of snitches. They required all members to give the names and addresses of close friends and family and were explicitly warned—sometimes while on psychedelic drugs—that if they snitched, they and their family would be subject to violent reprisals. In one rambling message from the WU—written after an AIM snitch took the stand against former comrades—published in radical periodicals at the time and believed to have been written by Bernadine Dorn, stated that the WU was not afraid to support the "[Charlie] Manson approach" when it came to "bringing hell on Earth for pig-snitches." It went into detail about how violently the WU would deal with snitches and their friends and family. This approach ended up being completely impractical for the WU because they neither had the members nor the support to pull off such grandiose plans. By the nature of being underground, they were marginalized and had little ability to strike out at snitches in any way. In fact, there is no evidence that any snitch on the WU was ever even bothered by the group. Whether this approach of terror was agreeable to the core values of the WU is hard to say since the WU position on violence and acceptable violence seemed to change constantly. It was however, consistent with the ultra-violent streak in the core leadership of the group. As a tactic it was counter-productive—it caused considerable debate in radical circles and most of it was negative. The cops also had little trouble turning folks associated with the WU, and a number of the most rhetorically violent members of the leadership either turned themselves in (thus snitching one themselves), or cut deals.

No resistance group in recent times can compare to the Black Panther Party (BPP)—and its factions—in terms of being completely infiltrated by snitches as well as law enforcement! The BPP, in the popular mind, is associated with violence and ultra-

militancy. The image of a tough leather-clad Black Panther carrying a shotgun is an ever present part of the iconography of the radical left. One would think that the BPP's approach to snitches would be similar to the RAF and the WU; however, they took a completely different approach and relied on community shame as a mechanism for dealing with snitches. This was a somewhat practical approach because they had a number of widely circulating publications an outlets to get information about snitches out. They also were followed closely by the radical left and had access to a staggering number of mediums to report to the broader cultures of resistance. It was certainly agreeable to the ideals of the BPP, which claimed to be the voice of specific communities and saw itself as a community-based organization. Tactically, the record speaks for itself. There were a large number of snitches, many who were not named until well after the fall of the BPP, and the government—which was particularly brutal and repressive in dealing with the BPP—never had trouble turning members affiliated with the BPP against the organization. In Chicago, for example, the number of snitches was nearly epidemic.

While the above examples are not particularly positive, they illustrate some of the difficulties we face in dealing with snitches today in our own communities—and thus the need for dialogue. However, groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Basque Separatists (ETA), and namely the WWII French Resistance Fighters (The Maquis), are positive examples of Communities in Resistance that dealt successfully with Snitch Culture. The Maquis, according to Gestapo/Vichy records, show that less than 5% of all detainees were "cooperative." William Volman, in his book, Rising Up and Rising Down, says that the Spanish—and French—governments have "never been successful in creating a culture of informations." The key is to learn from the mistakes of the past and forge our own response to snitches that is practical, agreeable to our core values, and tactically beneficial.

To understand why these groups—IRA, ETA, and the Maquis—were successful, we have to look not only at their formal and informal policies regarding snitches, but at the movements as a whole. There is precious little written in English about the ETA, but from the few sources available, Clean Hands, Dirty Wars, it seems that the ETA has ben able to avoid wide-spread Snitch Culture by the very nature of its resistance. It is heavily family- and community-based; nearly everyone knows everyone else and every Basque community has been affected by the draconian repression of the Madrid State. Since most Basque people are deeply attached to their homeland, even the non-nationalists, the idea of snitching on neighbors and comrades is wrought with practical difficulties. Raising the stakes for squealing, neighbors, co-workers, and friends would react negatively to the appearance of a snitch, and so anyone caught snitching would not only have to create a new social circle, but relocate.

The way to strengthen our communities and increase our resistance to Snitch Culture would begin by practicing real mutual aid. Very few groups actually work together in a way that is interrelated and that would actually help build our counter-infrastructure. For instance, people interested in identifying and gathering wild edibles could work with Food Not Bombs to provide food for people and lessen our dependence on even the trash of capitalism (trash that hopefully will not longer be around one day!), groups in different cities could pool money and have benefits to pay for the legal costs of prisoners in other places, and those choosing not to work could help provide daycare for working people who have to. The ways in which we can work together and support each other are limitless, and working together on projects and actions is a simple but unrivaled way to build trustworthy lines of communication based on experience—as well as creating networks of autonomous communities that support each other and would not tolerate a snitch among them.

Infrastructure is important if we are to provide support for people in prison that would actually function as a deterrent to snitching. For instance, we cannot give people jobs—if they want them—when they are out, or provide for people's families if they are put away. The counter-infrastructure we do have is largely based on entertainment, and while this is a positive thing in our communities, we must move beyond this into other territory. For many obvious reasons, creating an infrastructure that does not rely on capitalism, but is our very own, is absolutely vital to our ability to wage effective resistance.

We must also address the lack of support for our resistance in communities outside of Anarchist circles. One way other Communities of Resistance have been effective is that they had a large network of support in larger society. Besides the obvious, this larger support functioned as a way to propel resistance and created a climate of hope—a climate that Snitch Culture does not function very well in. This lack of support may be due to the fact that our definition of Anarchist culture is rather narrow. Although not true in the least, the image of Anarchists as young black-clad punks certainly does persist and is to an extent perpetuated by Anarchist culture. Anarchists should proudly proclaim themselves, but should also move beyond the stereotype and show our many faces: young and old, queer and straight, crusty and freshly-showered.

It should be clear that there is no simple solution to the persistence of Snitch Culture in our Communities of Resistance. This zine set out to begin a dialogue on how we can destroy Snitch Culture once and for all. As we have seen, we may currently be unable to prevent snitches in our fight for liberation because we lack the community support and infrastructure we need. This does not mean that we should ever, ever

of Snitch Culture. Snitches know that they will be reviled by some, but they can remain in our communities by moving to where they may be anonymous or because there are people who will not ostracize them and allow them to return. And even though our prisoner support is one of our strongest attributes, it fails to be the linchpin that prevents Snitch Culture, mainly because it is limited in scope.

What this leads us back to is building stronger communities capable of long-term resistance to the powers of the State. Community shame and prisoner support lack their necessary bite precisely because our Communities of Resistance are fractured, with no real communication or trust amongst groups. In tightly-knit societies like the Basque, snitches have nowhere to go because word will travel and they would face social isolation wherever they go. Shame only works when communities can communicate in a way that is informative and trustworthy. Without information about snitches, communities cannot take steps to isolate or shame that person; and without trust, communities have no idea if the information is reliable or that others will also take steps to ostracize a snitch.

In terms of prisoner support, our current Communities of Resistance offer a heartfelt support; however, due to our lack of infrastructure and support outside of traditional Anarchist circles, we cannot provide the all-encompassing prisoner support of the IRA. For instance, in most cases, we cannot offer jobs, money to families, or pay for legal representation. Most prisoners are shunted from public view and only a few are known on a national or international basis. On the contrary, IRA prisoners were glorified and at the height of the Troubles, the majority of the murals in IRA neighborhoods were dedicated to celebrating prisoners and their deeds. The culture of prisoners support in the IRA fostered an environment that made it desirable to not snitch, a desire based on a total community support for the prisoner and family. With some exceptions, this is emoting that we cannot currently provide.

Where this leaves us is on the brink of a solution. While we do seem to utilize the effective tactics in combatting Snitch Culture—prisoner support and community shame—they are not actually effective in stopping it. Snitch Culture is not an isolated problem, as mentioned earlier, but an interrelated issue with other problems facing our Communities of Resistance. It comes as no shock to hear that our communities are fragmented and that there is little communication or mutual aid between them. The same also goes for the lack of infrastructure or support of people not traditionally identified with Anarchists or other radical groups. We must seriously and critically examine our communities and search for ways that we can do things better, not just to defeat Snitch Culture, but to win!

The IRA put a tremendous amount of energy into prisoner support. In fact it was estimated by Gerald O'Mann that nearly 1/3 of all money raised by the IRA was spent directly on prisoner support. The Irish nationalist concept of prison support is more extensive than ours and includes family support, the glorification of prisoners, treating ex-prisoners like returning veterans, as well as in-jail support. An IRA prisoner was even elected to parliament while still in jail! This support seriously diluted the benefits of snitching and the consequences (often violent reprisals) greatly outweighed the benefits. The IRA, more than any other group, was successful in reducing the punitive nature of incarceration.

The Maquis used a combination of violent attacks on snitches as well as "reframing" propaganda. There is much written about the beatings and shootings carried out by the Maquis, but the historic record actually shows that the Maquis ability to carry out such attacks was extremely limited. They made use of very public reprisals, in no doubt due to the monopoly on news by the occupiers, which, in turn, increased their effectiveness. However, the use of violence can only be seen as a partial explanation for the success of the Maquis in resisting Snitch Culture. The Maquis used an effective propaganda that was based on the idea that they soon would be victorious, which made less attractive the cooperation with illegitimate authorities that would soon be removed. What is surprising when one reads the memoirs of resistance fighters and the historical accounts of everyday French people living under occupation is their firm and unshakeable belief that they would be liberated. In fact, most French people not only believed that they would be liberated, but liberated by the combined French Resistance forces. This belief gave legitimacy to the Maquis and made crossing them a more consequential prospect, since they believed they would come to power—which in fact many did.

In our own present Communities of Resistance there seems to be no clear theory or discipline regarding the issue of snitches, however, as Anarchists, our inherent critique of authority and power, knowledge of security culture, and decentralized style of organizing are certainly beneficial in fighting Snitch Culture. That said, the few approaches we have used in dealing with snitches have not been very successful. We seem to mainly operate under the same loose code somewhat akin to the "Revolutionary Discipline" of the RAF. The idea that 'Snitches get Stitches' is prevalent and agreeable to our politics, however it is impractical in that we lack the sheer numbers—both inside and outside of the jails—to make this a reality. 'Snitches get Stitches' functions more like the WU idea of terror and with the exact same results in preventing Snitch Culture: absolutely none. Knowing this, communities have also tried the BPP model of shame, but with the recent evidence of government infiltration of radical groups and organizations, former comrades turning into

collaborators with wiretaps, and friends arrested or under Grand Jury subpoenas naming names and cooperating with authorities, there is ample evidence that this too is ineffective and unlikely to stem the continuing tide of snitches.

It is easy to look at all of this and grow desperate. Snitch Culture is not a problem that can be easily solved and the very issues at the core of it run right through the heart of everything we are attempting. And perhaps that is the question and answer to this issue: what are we attempting? Why are some groups, like the ETA, the IRA, or the Maquis able to successfully deny attempts by those in power to fracture and break their cultures of resistance? Why do Anarchists, with the goals of destroying power and creating a new world of freedom and mutual aid, turn into 'cooperating witnesses' and sacrifice not just their dreams but those of the communities they belong to?

These are the questions we must ask ourselves if we want to build Communities of Resistance that will hopefully one day win. We must think of ways to strengthen our communities of autonomous individuals and build a resistance that is effective and sustainable in the long-term, instead of the current haphazard and reactive scrambling to each and every blow of government repression.

What can we learn from the Communities of Resistance that were successful in defeating Snitch Culture is that they believed wholeheartedly in their struggle. Those that were actively fighting, as well as those who supported them, did not see any choice but to liberate themselves from illegitimate authority and therefore say themselves individually as part of something larger. This should not be read as a call for individuals to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the collective, but to illustrate that people who believe what they are fighting for, and identify themselves personally with the success or failure of that fight, are less likely to betray the struggle because that struggle IS them.

However, it must be said that it is probably easier for people to identify with national liberation struggles that have—in a sense—simpler goals, than with something as complex and far-reaching as Anarchy. The Maquis wanted to overthrow the Nazi-collaborator Vichy government and to oust the German occupiers from France. The IRA wants to kick the English out of Ulster. The ETA wants autonomy from Spain and France and to preserve the Basque language and culture. These groups are fighting against one particular source of power, whereas Anarchists are struggling to destroy all power.

Considering the fact that Anarchy is more than just the liberation from one particular illegitimate authority and there as many battlefields as there are stars in the sky, it can become easy to feel disillusioned or ineffective. After all, authority and capitalism still exist and we are drowned in the propaganda that we have reached the End of history; that the Way Things Are will continue unabated, forever. Snitches in Communities of Resistance are often people whose identity with the struggle for total liberation has become fractured, or those who, in the face of the repressive power of the state, betray their communities because they feel there is little chance those communities can win.

If we are to defeat Snitch Culture in our Communities of Resistance, we must refute the propaganda of those in power. It means tearing up the history books because the end is not predetermined by anyone but us. The ways and means of building a resistance that can refuter their history and can engage in a sustainable and long-term struggle for freedom, are the same ones needed to give Snitch Culture the final blow. Clearly, this is not as simple as the suggestion 'Snitches get Stitches' but is the proverbial open-can-of-worms.

As detailed earlier, there have been plenty of failed experiments in dealing with the issues of snitches and the current epidemic of snitching cannot be stopped through random beatings or through the prospect of terror. While violence against snitches or collaborators may be necessary (the very public targeting of snitches utilized by the Maquis could prove useful) it is generally harmful or useless in ending Snitch Culture. Not only can the State outmatch us in terms of the violence it can expend, rendering moot a wholesale campaign of violent reprisals—as in the case of the RAF—it also seems counter to our politics of freedom to use the idea of terror to coerce people into line and could put off sympathetic or interested individuals—much like the WU did. This should not be read as a dismissal of the tactic of violence in our resistance, but as a strong critique of violence as a useful tool in combatting Snitch Culture.

What has the greatest possibility of working—although it currently does not—is community shame coupled with prisoner support. Community shame has the benefit of not being irrevocable—how can you make amends for shooting or beating someone terribly if it turns out they were wrongfully accused?—as well as providing a powerful disincentive for snitches by denying them friendship and support. Prisoner support is obviously positive in that it helps remove the power of violence that the State holds over people. Prisoners who feel support and know they will be cared for have less reason to abandon their principles and betray their friend. Coupled together, a strategy of strong communities of autonomous individuals that will not allow collaborators back in, along with a prisoner support in which the benefits of not snitching far outweigh any measure put forth by the State, seems to be the best course of action. Presently, however, these tactics have proved ineffective in the prevention